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## Introduction - the corpse in the closet: the Gothic, death, and modernity

‘The earth is a tomb, the gaudy sky a vault, we but walking corpses.’

Mary Shelley, ‘On Ghosts’, 1824.<sup>1</sup>

Gothicists readily identify death as one of the foremost terrors at the heart of their cultural field of study. Certainly, the engine of terror that Horace Walpole identifies in the Preface to the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) as fuelling that work (1982: 4) exemplifies Edmund Burke’s concept of sublime terror with its ‘*apprehension of pain or death*’ (emphasis added) ([1757] 1767: 96). The threat of death, in different manifestations, has since served as a key feature in Gothic works across various media. Curiously, an overview of the existing critical literature reveals a dearth of scholarship that explicitly engages with the subject of death in the Gothic. Death has been, to date, only tangentially referenced, ‘discussed’ by implication, and minimally theorised in association with the Gothic, a few noteworthy exceptions being the stellar, pioneering work of Elisabeth Bronfen and Barbara Creed on the abject female body/corpse, and insightful studies by Angela Wright and Dale Townshend devoted to the role of mourning and melancholia in the works of Ann Radcliffe. As the fifteen chapters in *The Gothic and Death* illustrate, bringing the Death Question into relief in the Gothic helps us make greater sense of this protean mode/aesthetic that, ‘with its invitation to melancholia and its obsession with the undead’, as Peter Walmsley aptly characterises it, partook of ‘a tradition of nationalist discourse about death’ that became pronounced in the late eighteenth century (2009: 53). Recognition of the prevalence of what I have elsewhere called the Gothic’s *necropoetics*

– comprised of death-focused symbols and tropes such as spectrality and the concept of *memento mori* – in combination with its necropolitics, which featured intergenerational power dynamics between the (un)dead and the living, further substantiates Walmsley’s claim while rendering more understandable the historical emergence of the Gothic (Davison, 2015). As Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen have rightly noted, ‘Representations of death necessarily engage questions about power: its locus, its authenticity, its sources, and how it is passed on’ (1993: 4–5). Drawing on the exciting body of scholarship in the burgeoning field of Thanatology Studies, the chapters in this collection aim to unearth a sense of the cultural work carried out by the Gothic in relation to death, dying, mourning, and memorialisation and, in the process, to expose and explore the role these experiences played in shaping the generic register of the Gothic. This volume also hopes to contribute both to the growing body of scholarship devoted to the intellectual history of death and loss, and to the joint domains of cultural theory and literary historiography by shedding new light on why the Gothic has served, across cultures and eras, as the aesthetic of choice through which to engage such issues. Notably, several of the chapters in this volume offer up an explanation, when we step back into history, as to why the changing face of the Death Question in the Gothic has been only tangentially examined.

According to sociologist Zygmunt Bauman in his groundbreaking book *Mortality, Immortality & Other Life Strategies* (1992), death is the ‘most persistent and indifferent’ adversity faced by humanity. Using notably Gothic rhetoric to describe it, Bauman deems death unmasterable by the Age of Reason. It is the ‘guilty secret [and] ... skeleton in the cupboard left in the neat, orderly, functional and pleasing home modernity promised to build’ (134). This description places Gothicists in recognisable territory as *memento mori*, the complex warning/reminder that we will all die, which is significantly ‘fissured between future and past’ (Royle, 2002: 196), litters the Gothic landscape. Death serves as the quintessential emblem of the Freudian uncanny in the Gothic; while being ‘of the home’ and familiar, it also remains secret, concealed, and unfamiliar, a reality that has become, like mourning, ‘obscene and awkward’, according to Jean Baudrillard (2007: 182), in the face of which we have – at least in our everyday lives – fallen silent. The advent of secular modernity, the putative triumph of Reason, and the unsettling of religious certainties during the Enlightenment about the existence of God, the soul, and the afterlife, constituted a

type of cultural trauma that alienated us from an earlier familiarity with death while giving rise to greater anxieties and uncertainties about mortality, loss, and remembrance. Elisabeth Bronfen astutely describes the result of this defamiliarisation as ‘a retreat from death in a double gesture of denial and mystification’ (1992: 86) accompanied by a deeply entrenched cultural schizophrenia where we denied and deferred the death of the self while recognising and even celebrating the death of the Other. This defamiliarisation is perhaps best captured in the line from Edward Young’s renowned Christian consolation poem *Night Thoughts* (1742–45): ‘All men think all men mortal but themselves.’ As Thanatology historian Philippe Ariès has argued, in stark contrast to and in defiance of the grotesque realities of the putrefying corpse, which generated our deep-seated anxiety and fear of our own death and the loss of our individuality, we created a new, beautiful, more spectralised Other who remained incorruptible and individually identifiable in his/her post-mortem state. This mixed response to death remains in evidence in our death-denying Western culture where discussion of our personal experiences with death is treated as taboo and shameful while we feed on a steady diet of graphically rendered, usually visually projected, carnage. How may we account for these phenomena and how has the Gothic served to mediate this paradoxical response?

While no chapter in this collection deals with Mary Shelley’s death-saturated and fixated Gothic masterpiece, *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus* (1818), that work sheds light on this transitional era (late eighteenth to early nineteenth century) in Western attitudes towards death. Shelley’s monomaniacal, overreaching scientist also holds lessons for our death-denying culture. On the heels of his mother’s sudden death from disease, a traumatised Victor, then a young student of natural philosophy, turns his attention to eradicating death and disease from the world. To this end, ironically, he produces a macabre, fleshly Creature fabricated from a multitude of different putrefying corpses collected from the charnel house, the dissecting room, and the slaughter-house (Shelley, 1997: 83). Gazing upon his newly made, inanimate Creature that signals for Victor the advent of a new era of undeath, he rapturously praises its beauty. As the Creature’s shocking and terrifying moment of birth and immediate paternal rejection further signal, however, in combination with his nightmarish crusade of carnage, Victor’s delusional dreams of attaining immortality can never be realised. The unpalatable fact persists: the reality of death may be repressed but remains utterly ineradicable. Indeed and arguably, no more powerful

embodiment of *memento mori* exists in Gothic literature than Victor's eight-foot tall, abjected, 'hideous progeny', a type of uncanny neomort, to borrow a term from the work of Giorgio Agamben, positioned between life and corpse. In an act of tremendously tragic irony, Victor achieves, as Elisabeth Bronfen aptly phrases it, the opposite of what he intended: thinking he has created a new being that is 'beyond mortality, ... he produces a death-machine, bent on the total destruction of his maker's social world' ([1998] 2009: 115). Indeed, the devastation is far more intense and personal as Victor's own description of the destruction makes clear. In his words, the Creature becomes 'my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to me' (57). In a strategically manipulated Monster-Maker dynamic that brilliantly exemplifies the Freudian death drive, Victor learns that while one may run from Death, one cannot hide. Several years later and subsequent to the sudden death of her husband, in her powerful yet unsettling essay 'On Ghosts' (1824), the source of this chapter's epigraph, Mary Shelley, makes eminently clear that we all, as Victor's literal walking corpse of a Creature reminds us, carry our future corpse within us: all who live must, inevitably, die. 'One is mortal', Todd May powerfully observes, echoing Shelley, 'not only at the end of one's life, but all throughout it' (2009: 7).

As several chapters in this volume attest and as *Frankenstein* suggests, much inheres, from the Enlightenment onwards, in the multivalent corpse. Positioned at the threshold of the (possible) next world where it signals the paradoxically dreaded-yet-desired annihilation of our subjectivity and signposts a (possible) secular cul-de-sac, the corpse has become the 'supreme signifier for anything from human destiny and its redemption to life's meaninglessness' (Webster Goodwin and Bronfen, 1993: 17). Bound up with the exercise and abuse of political power, corpses also tap the deep Romantic well of affect to different ends. They are crucial to the expression and exploration of subjectivity while also serving as contested sites, and figurative battlefields, for various ideas and debates, particularly those that involve religious ideologies and philosophies and their moral authority. As is repeatedly illustrated in the Gothic, this uncanny subject/object that often refuses to stay dead, has been 'imbued with otherworldly powers' (Quigley, 1996: 18), invested with our pre-Enlightenment superstitious beliefs and ideas, and figuratively buried. This process notably occurred in tandem with our invention of funerary receptacles such as coffins with screwed-down lids and sealed, concrete burial vaults (Ragon, 1983:

16), to hide the offending 'thing' from our collective view. Our mixed post-Enlightenment sentiments of denial, dread, and desire in relation to death have been projected onto this socio-cultural body/corpse that serves,<sup>2</sup> as Alan Bewell has rightly noted, 'as the nexus of all spiritual imagery ... [as] all narratives about life after death can be reduced to and derive their formal organisation from a primary confrontation, which every culture and every individual repeats, with the bodies of the dead' (1989: 190). Such repressed anxieties and desires have been especially projected onto the abjected *female* corpse (Bronfen, 1992: 86) that serves as a grotesque Bakhtinian reminder of one's origins (birth) and telos (death), a projection registered in the proliferation of the supernatural, uncanny undead in the Gothic.

That corpses occupy such a prominent place in the Gothic and the collective consciousness at the advent of a secularising modernity makes sense given the shifting meaning of *memento mori* in combination with the pre-eminence of corpses during the French Revolution, a cataclysmic series of historical events that figure prominently in Part II of this collection. *Frankenstein* references this transition in the execution of the innocent Justine that resonates powerfully with the state-sanctioned massacre of tens of thousands of purported 'enemies of the revolution' by guillotine during the bloody Reign of Terror (September 1793 to July 1794). Against this backdrop, corpses not only registered power dynamics between the living, but between the living and the dead, the latter emblematising previous generations and the past more generally. Indeed, a new cultural epistemology was in the process of being negotiated that involved the creation of a religiously and nationally inflected social contract between the living and the dead. This negotiation featured prominently in socio-political and theological debates. The necrocracy (dominion of the dead) famously identified by Edmund Burke in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* as characterising the British constitution – 'an entailed inheritance (1790: 47) that grips the state and its citizens in a type of "mortmain for ever"' (1790: 48) – was condemned as classist, archaic, and a type of 'necrophiliac abomination' (Duggett, 2010: 50) by such thinkers as Thomas Paine and William Wordsworth. Their writings suggest that they favoured Thomas Jefferson's philosophy as articulated in a letter to James Madison in 1789: 'the dead have neither powers nor rights over the earth' which 'belongs in usufruct to the living' (Jefferson, 1945: 130).

Gothic novels published during its early, classical era (1764–1824)

grant expression to this new cultural epistemology positioned between what is represented as a perverse, superstitious Roman Catholic necrocracy characterised by a dominion of the dead, and the careless abuse and annihilation of the dead as promoted in Anglo-American radical philosophy. Indeed, the latter abuses, exemplified by the spectacular excesses and violations perpetrated during the September Massacres,<sup>3</sup> led to a revitalised brand of Gothic that radically transformed its established tropes, as Ronald Paulson has shown (1983: 221), and positioned its necropoetics and necropolitics more centre stage as illustrated in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) and the works of Ann Radcliffe. Death was notably and frequently represented in the early, classic Gothic as a destabilising, disruptive force involving inter-generational, historical crimes/sins requiring exposure, recognition, and appeasement by way of mourning rituals and memorialisation processes. Across literary forms, Anglo-American Gothic meditations on mortality and Life's Big existential and ontological Questions also subsequently altered, in radical and powerful ways, the face of literary history, reaching their efflorescence in what Robert D. Hume has categorised as a type of metaphysical Gothic in the early to mid-nineteenth century (1969: 290).

In the face of Enlightenment-generated anxieties about the afterlife and the loss of subjectivity, ideas, sites, and practices around mourning and memorialisation were radically altered. Mourning became a more fraught process that could lend itself, as readers readily recognise in the cases of both Heathcliff and Victor Frankenstein, to melancholic excess, an emotional extreme that characterises most Gothic hero-villains. Notably, mourning was extended in this industrialising era of rapid change, to the past more generally – to former, lost belief systems and certainties rendered obsolete due to historical shifts. As Jolene Zigarovich has accurately noted, underlying the 'embrace of death was an uneasiness about the rapidity of change. Anxieties regarding the moral, physical, and spiritual decay of people and culture were inevitably personified and figured in narrative' (2012: 5). Given its elaborate mourning rituals and what has been called its 'pornography' of death (see Gorer, 1965), Victorian England has been provocatively and aptly described, for example, as a necroculture in 'mourning for lost fixtures, in the world and of the spirit, which the acceleration of a coveted yet feared modernity had swept away' (Tucker, 1999: 122). That the Gothic continued to flourish in newly transmuted forms throughout that period was largely the result of that nation's monomania about

death. Britons also encountered multifarious cultural rituals and attitudes towards death in the course of their imperialist ventures that were channelled into Gothic literature.

The memorialisation of the dead likewise assumed greater importance in the face of anxieties induced by modernity. A failure or refusal to memorialise contributed, among other things, to the concept of persecutory, haunting ghosts associated with the Gothic hero-villain who is often also a persecutor. As Terry Castle has argued in *The Female Thermometer* (1995), the new model of haunted consciousness that arose during the Enlightenment evidences a new spectrality that, while featuring ghosts of a different, non-Catholic, non-Purgatorial order, nevertheless signify the presence of guilt arising from past transgressions or, as Avery Gordon persuasively argues about the driving forces behind the ghost story, 'a repressed or unresolved social violence' (2008: xvi).

In allowing a cultural space for the imaginative, post-Enlightenment treatment of the Death Question by way of ghosts and corpses and a host of other undead, the Gothic rendered death fascinating and offered the unique invitation to experience what Elisabeth Bronfen describes as 'death by proxy' (2009: 114), an attractive and even desirable experience because 'apparently unreal' (113). It also allowed readers to engage with death-related subject matter considered too macabre, controversial, or sensitive within certain cultures and societies. In its pages, readers may indulge dark death-related fantasies and fears, the Gothic becoming, as Dale Townshend has claimed drawing on the work of Coral Ann Howells, 'a socially symbolic site of mourning' that permitted and promoted the expression of the 'more macabre realities of corporeal decomposition and religious insecurity' and what Townshend calls a 'negated grief' that ranged beyond what tame neo-Classical proprieties dictated and allowed (2008: 89).

Attentive to our changing, often ambivalent experiences with death and bereavement, and the changing status of corpses – whether portrayed as dead or undead – as social bodies that must be critically analysed and 'read' in the light of their shifting cultural and historic contexts, *The Gothic and Death* is organised around five pre-eminent death-related themes/preoccupations spanning the eighteenth to the twenty-first centuries. The chapters in Part I, 'Gothic graveyards and afterlives', coalesce around anxieties about, and representations of, the grave and post-mortem spiritual existence and experience as expressed in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic literature and its hugely

influential precursor, Graveyard Poetry. Both forms lent expression to anxieties and desires about the grave while contributing to ‘a tradition of nationalist discourse about death’ (Walmsley, 2009: 53) and engaging in a type of immortalising process. According to Deidre Shauna Lynch, both notably enabled ‘the British public to probate [their] ... literary inheritance’ in the form of medieval romance, and foregrounded a ‘ghost-seeing’ that ‘sought to keep open lines of communication with the literary dead’ (2008: 51). This proliferation of historically fixated cultural forms ‘quest[ed] for intimacy with the dead’ more generally (Westover, 2012: 8), engendering what Paul Westover has nicely called ‘Necromanticism’, ‘a complex of antiquarian revival, book-love, ghost-hunting, and monument-building that emerged in the age of revolutions and mass print’ (3).

In ‘Past, present, and future in the Gothic graveyard’ (Chapter 1), Serena Trowbridge examines the development of an aesthetic of mortality in Graveyard Poetry that influenced later Gothic novels. She notes their shared atmospherics and preoccupations with the past as a means of envisaging the future, as well as their common reliance on a Christian belief system that heralds and celebrates life after death while engendering reflections on the inevitability of mortality. Focusing on denominational beliefs and changing metaphysical attitudes towards death in the seventeenth century that were predicated on a body/soul division, Trowbridge’s chapter is also attentive to death’s transformation in the wake of Graveyard Poetry from signalling a reminder of death with an eye to a future world to inducing anxiety in the Gothic given the prospect of a post-mortem loss of individuality. Sibylle Erle’s chapter, “‘On the very Verge of legitimate Invention’: Charles Bonnet and William Blake’s illustrations to Robert Blair’s *The Grave* (1808)’ (Chapter 2), extends Trowbridge’s investigation in its analysis of William Blake’s illustrations for Graveyard Poet Robert Blair’s *The Grave* (1808) and the reception of that edition. According to Erle, these illustrations interceded in European debates about the immortality of the soul and evidenced Blake’s awareness of the physiognomical theory of Johann Caspar Lavater, for whom he had created earlier engravings (1789–98). The chapter examines Blake’s relationship to the Gothic’s obsession with death and dying and argues that his images superseded the Gothic and visual quality of the language of Blair’s text by asserting the immediacy and reality of afterlife existence and experiences.

Moving into the Victorian era where, as Francis O’Gorman has incisively articulated, what made ‘the cultural history of the Victorians and



the dead distinctive and important, was not, in fact, death [but] ... life: eternal life' (2010: 255), Bruce Wyse (Chapter 3) considers the Gothic's changing relationship to Christianity and its worldview on death as reflected in Horace Smith's little known novel, *Mesmerism: A Mystery* (1845). In this unusual hybrid of Gothic fiction and its contrary, the novel of religious faith, mesmerism takes centre stage, a phenomenon that, its proponents claimed, demonstrated the latent paranormal powers of the mind as a vehicle for fantasising about death's universal mystery. Wyse demonstrates in 'Entranced by death: Horace Smith's *Mesmerism*', how the central tenets of Christianity recede in Smith's novel while Death itself assumes the place of the principal redeemer of humankind. Indeed, death becomes a metonym for heaven in a work that remains, given Smith's introduction of a provocative, psychological analysis of its protagonist, marked by irresolution and a tension between the Gothic and the novel of faith.

Part II, 'Gothic revolutions and undead histories', considers the Death Question in association with the concept of gothicised history and inheritance, ideas inextricably bound up with the French Revolution during the 'Classic Gothic' era (1764–1824). As several of the chapters in this volume suggest, history was not only a condition of modernity, it was itself gothicised at the advent of modernity when it was popularly represented as a form of Gothic plotment marked by a haunting dialectic between the barbaric, obscurantist past (the dead) and the progressive, civilised present (the living). Thus did mourning and melancholia become inextricably bound up with modernity, an association central to what David L. Eng and David Kazanjian call 'an intellectual history of loss' (2003: 6) that was expressed across a variety of history-inflected literary genres including, and especially, the Gothic. Notably, and in keeping with Walter Benjamin's characterisation of the historical materialist's ongoing and open 'dialogue' with the past, such cultural productions were underpinned by a healthy melancholia – rather than a pathological form of mourning as Freud defines it in his early writings on the subject – that brought modernity's 'ghosts and specters, its flaring and fleeting images, into the present' (Eng and Kazanjian, 2003: 4).

Recognising these historical complexities and dynamics, in "This dreadful machine": the spectacle of death and the aesthetics of crowd control' (Chapter 4), Emma Galbally and Conrad Brunström consider the French Revolution as both a Gothic and an anti-Gothic moment that redeployed the barbaric horrors of mass execution in the name of

'Enlightenment'. They investigate the guillotine as a symbol of this tension, offering, as it did, the mechanisation of terror while, in the highly popular form of theatrical presentations of mock execution, allowing for mass entertainment and social commentary. To this end, they consider James Boaden's *Aurelio and Miranda* (1798), an adaptation of Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), and George Reynolds' *Bantry Bay* (1797), as stage entertainments that accommodated and sanitised this spectacle as part of the Revolutionary Gothic.

In 'Undying histories: Washington Irving's Gothic afterlives' (Chapter 5), Yael Maurer then turns to an examination of the aftermath of the French Revolution and the guillotine – its spectacular instrument of mechanised terror – in the context of the American Gothic. She analyses Washington Irving's deployment of a 'gothic engine' in 'The Adventure of the German Student' (1824), and discusses 'Rip Van Winkle' (1819) and 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow' (1820), as exemplifying Irving's reimagining of history as a Gothic site, where what Robert Hughes has called 'the nightmare of history' manifests itself in the form of ghosts and revenants. In Chapter 6, 'Deadly interrogations: cycles of death and transcendence in Byron's Gothic', Adam White then offers a psychoanalytic reading of Byron's *The Two Foscari* (1821), *The Prisoner of Chillon* (1816), as well as *Manfred* (1817) and *Sardanapalus* (1821), in relation to Sigmund Freud's death-drive principle. White examines the compulsion to repeat scenes and images of death in these works, as well as – in a move away from the Gothic – their depictions of transcending death. He especially attends to the Walpolean Gothic trope of 'the sins of the fathers being visited upon the sons', asking how the dead, ancestral past interacts with the living present.

Part III of this collection, 'Gothic apocalypses: dead selves/dead civilisations', considers death as a Gothic vector for exploring the spectres of cultural and global degeneration and annihilation in texts ranging from the ecoGothic and 'Lost World' fictions to the zombie cinema. The scholars in this section examine how depictions of mass death in the Gothic have, since the late eighteenth century, registered social concerns about expansion, scarcity, and resource management. Adopting an ecocritical approach to the Gothic, Jennifer Schell (Chapter 7) investigates how the writings of Mary Shelley and Nathaniel Hawthorne extrapolate upon the fears that arose out of Georges Cuvier's work on extinction in the late eighteenth century. Schell's chapter, 'The annihilation of self and species: the ecoGothic sensibilities of Mary Shelley and

Nathaniel Hawthorne', identifies and discusses emergent scientific and environmental anxieties, as well as contemporary concerns about how British and American expansion would have an impact on ecological stability and, ultimately, whether this would lead to *human* extinction. In 'Death cults in Gothic "Lost World" fiction', John Cameron Hartley (Chapter 8) then turns to a popular Anglo-American nineteenth-century novelistic sub-genre penned by such authors as Edgar Allan Poe, James De Mille, and H. Rider Haggard. Focusing on Haggard's lucrative imperial adventure novels at the *fin de siècle*, an era that saw a tremendous public enthusiasm for Egyptology and other archaeological discoveries, Hartley considers how, by way primarily of the characters of Allan Quatermain and Horace Holly, contact with various cults of death served as meditations upon notions of personal, national, and imperial evolution and degeneration.

Finally, in 'Dead again: zombies and the spectre of cultural decline' (Chapter 9), Matthew Pangborn traverses between evocations of the 'zombie' in British debates on the French Revolution through to twentieth-century film. His chapter examines that uncannily undead figure as a metaphor for a disturbing dynamic – namely, that if a culture 'naturally' matures, it must also be impelled – as if from the 'other side' – into decrepitude and dissolution. As Pangborn cogently discusses and illustrates, this dynamic is especially in evidence in the contemporary resuscitation of the zombie figure that is frequently employed to engage with the energy crisis and the 'Green Revolution'.

Part IV, 'Global Gothic dead', provides evidence of the Death Question as a transcultural and transhistorical phenomenon and pre-occupation from Bollywood to the Caucasus that has attracted, significantly and with a variety of objectives, a Gothic treatment. As these authors show in a spectrum of cinematic and literary productions set against various national backgrounds marked by distinct socio-cultural and theological attitudes to death – Italian, Russian, and East Indian – *memento mori* remains a powerful yet variously meaningful concept. Each dialogues with the Anglo-American Gothic, to different ends and with unique agendas, while forging its own aesthetically innovative and culturally unique expressions. Beginning in Italy (Chapter 10), a popular Southern European backdrop for much British Gothic fiction exploring what is traditionally represented as abusive Roman Catholic authority, we move on to Russia (Chapter 11), where some readers may be surprised to see, in various nineteenth-century naturalist works, the traces of Anglo-American Gothic influence. Part IV concludes in

India (Chapter 12) where, in a nation decidedly marked by British imperialism yet utterly distinct in its cultural, theological, and philosophical contexts, a cinematic flirtation with the Gothic is not only discernible but strategically manipulated.

In ‘A double dose of death in Iginio Ugo Tarchetti’s “I fatali”’ (Chapter 10), Christina Petraglia considers the literary moment of the *Scapigliatura* that, in its shared stylistic affinities with the European Gothic, constitutes an Italian style Gothic. More specifically, Petraglia investigates the marriage of death and the double in the oeuvre of the Italian progenitor of fantastic literature, Iginio Ugo Tarchetti, a marriage made before this connection was established in psychoanalytic literature. Taking Tarchetti’s short story ‘I fatali’ as her primary case study, Petraglia outlines how the author embodies death in father-and-son pair Count Sangrezwitch and Baron Saternez. Moving into the domain of Russian naturalism in ‘Through the opaque veil: the Gothic and death in Russian Realism’ (Chapter 11), Katherine Bowers demonstrates how a movement that called for ‘realistic’ depictions of dying curiously engaged Gothic elements imported from Western models. Her chapter evaluates how authors such as Ivan Turgenev and Anton Chekhov employed these Gothic elements not merely to embellish the experience of dying, but to serve as a literary *modus operandi* that allowed for the interrogation of deeper existential questions about the fear of death. The section concludes with Vijay Mishra’s fascinating chapter, ‘Afterdeath and the Bollywood Gothic noir’ (Chapter 12), an examination of a sub-genre of the capricious Indian cinematic melodrama that asks how culturally distinct figurations of death and an afterlife influence cinematic engagements with timeless ‘Gothic’ questions. Mishra examines a number of classic Bollywood Gothic film noirs, paying specific attention to the ways in which the idea of eternal recurrence enters into the Indian demotic of ghosts and spirits to interrupt the logic of reincarnation.

This collection’s concluding section, Part V, ‘Twenty-first-century Gothic and death’, explores how the advent of contemporary advancements in technology in such areas as media and healthcare influenced Gothic-related cultural productions dealing with the Death Question. On the heels of a century that has seen horrifying global wars and mass exterminations where we may be said to suffer from an overexposure to death, as Benjamin Noys maintains in *The Culture of Death* (2005), twenty-first-century Gothic treatments of the Death Question register what Philippe Ariès calls the ‘invisible death’ (1981: 557),

which is divested of ritual, and where the dying/the dead are ignored and unmourned. Part V's contributors ask how twenty-first-century technological advancements have complicated our ideas of mourning, haunting, and the 'afterlife' of the self. In 'Dead and ghostly children in contemporary literature for young people' (Chapter 13), Michelle J. Smith opens this section by surveying a burgeoning genre of young adult and children's literature from the past decade that draws on the Gothic while featuring dead and ghostly children. She advances the idea that vastly improved child mortality rates, among other cultural shifts, have dramatically altered the meaning of child-death in literature. Whereas Victorian and Edwardian fictions were inclined to present child-death in a comforting light due to a commonly short lifespan, contemporary fictions frequently use this theme as a vehicle for social critique as expressed and exposed in the past wrongs of adults that require redressing. Her chapter further examines a unique strain of contemporary Gothic literature involving child revenants whose symbolic weight has shifted in the face of twenty-first-century violence.

In 'Modernity's fatal addictions: technological necromancy and E. Elias Merhige's *Shadow of the Vampire*' (Chapter 14), Carol Margaret Davison addresses the motion picture's obsession with death, particularly as represented in the form of the sexually fetishised, murdered female corpse. Building from Leo Tolstoy's observation that cinematic technology has the peculiar quality of rendering the film star an 'undead', regnant figure, she turns to E. Elias Merhige's *Shadow of the Vampire* (2000) as a critical commentary on the 'vampirism' of cinematic technologies. Her chapter theorises about the stakes involved in our contemporary media addiction to, and cultural fascination with, the dead woman on screen. Finally, moving into the domain of contemporary technology's aim to immortalise the human subject, Neal Kirk (Chapter 14) explores the 'Be Right Back' episode of Charlie Brooker's Gothic small-screen series, *Black Mirror*, that engages the issue of how users of new, addictive, spectralised media technologies encounter death, loss, and memorialisation. In "'I'm not in that thing you know . . . I'm remote. I'm in the cloud": networked spectrality in Charlie Brooker's "Be Right Back"', Kirk reads the episode through the lens of what he calls 'networked spectrality'. He considers the relevant developmental, technical, social, and political dynamics of digital networks and dependent technologies, and asks the complex, provocative question as to how and with what implications the concept of 'haunting' is adapted to convey a digital undead presence that persists after death.

As evidenced by its necropoetics and necropolitics, its melancholic characters in mourning, and its narrative preoccupation with mortality, the ineffable, and undeath/the undead, the Gothic has, since its inception, fetishised death and been deeply invested in death-related and religiously/spiritually inflected post-mortality issues. Indeed, this quintessential product of its Romantic, revolutionary historic moment, registered, like various other cultural forms of the Enlightenment era, the 'obsession with death' that Marilyn Butler identifies as prevalent in British literature between 1760 and 1790 (1981: 27). True to form and in keeping with Western thanatological attitudes post-Enlightenment, death served ambivalently in the Gothic, then as now, as both a centripetal and centrifugal narrative force.

This volume endeavours to unearth and theorise the nature of the death obsession cited by Butler as it was manifested across dozens of Gothic productions, which feature different national, historical, and socio-cultural contexts. In each instance, the mode provides an index of various death-related anxieties, terrors, and desires. In this objective, this pioneering scholarly volume aims to be suggestive rather than comprehensive or exhaustive, hoping to lay some necessary and valuable groundwork for future scholarship. While death is always, as Webster Goodwin and Bronfen rightly underscore, misrepresented, as it is ultimately unknowable (1993: 19), cultural engagements with this complex and multifaceted subject that possesses aspects simultaneously physical and metaphysical, literal and symbolic, are eminently fascinating to intellectual and cultural historians.

As Vijay Mishra's chapter in this volume cogently argues, attitudes towards death, such as the concepts of haunting, *memento mori*, and the afterlife, vary significantly across cultures and historic periods. While some of death's terrors, like those generated by the prospect of subjectivity's annihilation and the silencing of voice, have remained constant, significant transmutations have occurred in their narrative treatment. What Thomas Laqueur has characterised as a changing 'culture of death' (2001: 23) has been in evidence in Gothic literature since its inception. In the works of Ann Radcliffe, for example, a more middle-class, Protestant 'culture of death' was featured, one that positioned itself in opposition to a Roman Catholic 'culture of death' by promoting death's compartmentalisation from life alongside its domestication, sanitisation, and sentimentalisation. More contemporary Anglo-American Gothic texts push the boundaries on the graphically grotesque very self-reflexively, almost daring their viewers, who are

violence- and death-saturated as a result of sensational news and other media, to watch bloody, gruesome horrors unfold as the protagonist hovers on the brink of death.

It has been said that '[m]any of the cultural systems concerned with death are in fact constructed to give a voice to the silenced dead' (Webster Goodwin and Bronfen, 1993: 6). The same is true of certain cultural forms. Graveyard Poetry and other eighteenth-century British literature worked to tame death-related terrors and appease mourners with visions of a peaceful afterlife of family reunion. As such, these works served as a new type of Protestant consolation literature that, albeit indirectly, assisted those in mourning, an experience that is ultimately universal. While the Gothic functioned in this capacity, it also granted expression to both the irrepressible terrors generated by the prospect of the grave and of encounters with the spectral and corporeal undead who, often unmourned and unmemorialised, lay beyond it. In thus reflecting on our relationship to personal, socio-political, and cultural history, the Gothic tapped questions about our inheritances from, and debts to, our dead forefathers and foremothers. Such Gothic meditations continue to this day, interrogating and challenging Hamlet's poetic description of death as 'the undiscovered country, from whose bourn / No traveller returns'. Despite concerted contemporary scientific efforts to prolong life indefinitely, the terror of death that annihilates subjectivities and silences voices remains, spectres abound, and the Gothic persists, popular and relevant. Gothic engagements with death may immortalise their authors and, for a time, reader-survivors may engage in the process of cultural reception, thinking with relief, '*Lugeo ergo sum*: I mourn, therefore, I am'. Identified and characterised by Terry Castle, this new mantra of devotionism in Radcliffe's era that signposted a 'new immortalizing habit of thought' (1995: 135), reaffirmed interests on both sides of the grave: the memorialisation of the lost loved one and the ongoing existence of the surviving mourner. True to form, however, the Gothic continues to reassert, in a compelling multitude of ways, its other most powerful and unsettling warning – *memento mori* – in the face of which some of us, striving for immortality of another order, will continue to create cultural productions.

## Notes

- 1 See Shelley, 1990, p. 336
- 2 One of the most curious post-Enlightenment superstitious practices relating to corpses involved the belief that the touch of a freshly hanged man's hand could cure physical ailments and ward off dangers and bad health. See Davies and Matteoni, 2015.
- 3 It is noteworthy that, from the establishment of the Directory in France in November of 1795 onwards, as part of an attempt to return a greater sense of socio-political stability and normalcy to the Republic, 'the corpse once again ... [became] taboo in the public sphere' (de Baecque, 2001: 11).

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